
NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Nanci Gonder, Office of Public Information
573-751-6062

New report on secondhand smoke focuses on danger to children

October is National Child Health Month

A new report from the U.S. Surgeon General calls on parents to eliminate their children's exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke. Coinciding with National Child Health Month in October, the Surgeon General's message warns of the health risks secondhand smoke creates for the nation's children.

"There is quite simply no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure," said acting Surgeon General Kenneth Moritsugu, M.D. "Parents need to protect their families from this completely preventable health hazard."

According to the Surgeon General's report, 60 percent of children in the United States age 3-11 are exposed to secondhand smoke, which contains more than 4,800 chemicals including formaldehyde, arsenic and hydrogen cyanide.

The report follows last year's landmark study by the Surgeon General that states the science is clear that exposure to secondhand smoke is a serious health threat to nonsmokers.

"Without equivocation, secondhand smoke causes premature death and disease," Moritsugu said. "Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), acute respiratory infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia, middle ear disease, more severe asthma and slowed lung growth."

Children in the United States are more heavily exposed to secondhand smoke than nonsmoking adults, the Surgeon General said.

"Children are often powerless to protect themselves from the health risks associated with secondhand smoke, but adults are not," said Stan Cowan, manager of the Tobacco Use Prevention Program at the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. "Parents, as well as caregivers, community leaders and other adults, can help keep youth healthy by eliminating the dangers of secondhand smoke from the environment."

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Tobacco smoke is often present where young people spend most of their time – at home, in cars, and at many public places including restaurants, where teenage youth frequently work part-time jobs.

In order to protect children from secondhand smoke, Moritsugu says parents should:

- Make homes and vehicles smoke-free at all times. Smokers in the home, whether they are family members or guests, should always go outside to smoke. Opening a window in a home or vehicle is not enough.
- Be certain their children's day care centers and schools are 100 percent smoke- and tobacco-free.
- Assure that the restaurants and other public places where they take their children are smoke-free.
- Insist that no one smokes around their children.

Missouri's Tobacco Use Prevention Program recently began distributing materials to pediatricians across the state to help educate parents about the illnesses that secondhand smoke can cause in children. The materials also promote the state's Tobacco Quitline, which smokers can call for free help to quit smoking. The Quitline number is 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).

The Surgeon General's report, *Children and Secondhand Smoke Exposure: Excerpts from The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*, can be found at: www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/smokeexposure/.

More information about the Missouri Tobacco Quitline and the dangers of tobacco use and secondhand smoke can be found at: www.dhss.mo.gov/SmokingAndTobacco/.

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